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ABSTRACT

A grammar based on speech acts to be used by second language teachers, syllabus planners, and instructional materials writers is outlined. The grammar proposes only two basic categories of speech act: (1) those involving a negotiation between speaker and addressee, and (2) those designed by the speaker to give information to the addressee. The largest portion of the grammar would apply to informational speech acts and resemble a traditional grammar, and a separate section involving the same linguistic forms but including most of the imperatives and questions would focus on negotiation. The argument that English lends itself to this approach is illustrated with the English system of modals and a conversation from a British novel. (MSE)

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A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO A PEDAGOGIC GRAMMAR

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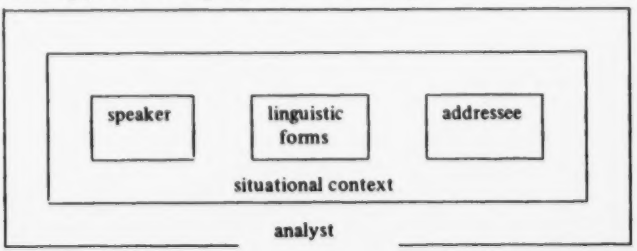
A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO A PEDAGOGIC GRAMMAR

For most practical purposes the relationship between language learning and language teaching is close, in that insights into learning processes are sought in order to assist teaching. My theme is the shape of a pedagogic grammar such as might be used by teachers for reference, or more directly by syllabus planners and course book writers to guide the preparation of teaching materials. Such a grammar should in some degree reflect the teaching process, the major task of which I assume is to relate linguistic forms to meanings, in the widest sense of the term meaning. I shall suggest a Speech Act approach to a pedagogic grammar, but one in which there are only two basic categories. Each speech act involves either a negotiation between speaker and addressee(s) or is designed by the speaker to give information to the addressee. The grammar would be shaped round these two categories. Perhaps the larger section would revolve round the information category and might resemble a fairly traditional grammar, but a separate section, often involving the same linguistic forms, but including most of the description of imperatives and questions for example, would center around the negotiation category. My main purpose is to justify such an approach. This will involve touching on major linguistic issues, but as the paper is short, the treatment is not exhaustive.

One strong reason for adopting a psycholinguistic approach to a pedagogic grammar is the very practical one that much recent work in applied linguistics, as this volume demonstrates, is psycholinguistic in character. This research involves delving into the processes of the mind. When we turn to grammar we find that there are already partial descriptions of English within a model which claims to be psycholinguistic, that is within the generative grammar tradition of Chomsky and his followers. To quote Smith and Wilson[1]

"The job of the linguist is to attempt an explicit, conscious formulation of the grammatical rules that speakers know. Linguistics conceived of in this way is concerned with one aspect of the human mind, and is therefore correctly classed as a branch of psychology." Matthews has pointed out that a transformational grammar need not simultaneously claim to be a model of speaker competence, but for those who are prepared to swallow the Chomsky line, one of the problems that should ultimately be solved by applied linguistics is whether the processes involved in language learning are the same as those involved in learning other things, or different; or rather, whether the processes involved in the acquisition of competence follow their own principles, which are in turn different from those used for the acquisition of communicative competence, or rules for speaking. If so, learning how much body contact should accompany speech in Italy, or in England, follows the same lines as learning history or table manners. So too would the acquisition of Grice's maxims, if these are part of the rules for speaking, but the acquisition of grammar, lexis and phonology would follow its own quite distinct principles.

The Chomsky line has been criticised, perhaps the most formidable critic being Matthews, but he is not the only one (cf. Sampson). But one indirect and very beneficial effect of Chomsky's theory of competence has been to make applied linguists realise the limitations of the teaching of competence as he defined it as a goal of language teaching. Hence the invention of the term communicative competence and the reawakening of interest in syllabus design, the base for such syllabuses being the analysis of language in terms of functions, or notions or situations. Perhaps I could use the term functions as an umbrella term to describe the uses to which language is put. Such an approach to language typology is most likely to be sociolinguistically based, where the analyst stands outside the speaker and addressee as well as the linguistic context, and approaches language from that viewpoint.



Discourse analysis adopts this viewpoint, and while the resulting descriptions could be of great value in helping to define the end product of the language teaching process, there are still great problems in it for the language teacher and syllabus designer.

Because formal teaching occurs within a framework of ordered units, to be of use to him the language teacher needs a taxonomy of functions. Considering the immense varieties of use to which language has been, and is, put, it seems unlikely, however, that there will ever be a consensus on a sociologically based taxonomy of functions. In practice, for some language learners it is not possible to know with any precision, when they are learning the language, what they are going to be needing it for. This sets limits on the value of a sociologically based taxonomy of functions. Moreover, the contexts in terms of speaker, addressee and situation in which foreign languages are taught very rarely correspond to the contexts in which the language will later be used. There are practical limitations on the simulation of contexts within the classroom.

These objections might not apply to the same extent if a psycholinguistic approach to the functions of language is adopted. Because the analyst will be attempting to draw up his taxonomy of functions from a position inside the head of the speaker (or addressee), might it not be possible to think of situational context in abstract terms, or ignore it altogether? Effectively language functions would be seen in terms of speaker intentions and the taxonomy would consist of different kinds of illocutionary force or perlocutionary effect. For a pedagogic grammar, speaker intention as the basic viewpoint would seem to be a reasonable one. Every time a person speaks he has some intention, and the learner, as addressee, needs to be able to interpret correctly the intentions of speakers of the foreign language, as well as be able to express his own intentions. This is the Speech Act theory of Austin and Searle, and within the transformational framework Ross has suggested imposing a performative on the structural description and semantic interpretation of every sentence. But in drawing up a taxonomy of speech functions, how is a line to be drawn, except in an arbitrary manner, between for example, a suggestion, advice, a request, and even an order? "In general there is no precise typology of speech acts ... If we try to find one we will merely make our judgement dizzy."[2] And in what terms are these categories to be expressed, except, inexactly, by attachment to a linguistic form? But linguistic forms

extracted from context are not readily attached to any specific category of speech act. An utterance like

Sit down

has to be seen as having an infinite variety of illocutionary forces ranging from the mildest suggestion to a forceful command. It could even be a question, or a comment.

Given a variety of specified contexts an utterance like

It is raining

could variously be interpreted as:

a) Perhaps our visitors won't come
b) How awful that we have to go out
c) I'm going to take refuge in this shop
d) Please close the window
e) Take your umbrella
f) Shall I take in the washing?

In Deirdre Wilson's terms these are pragmatic implications yielded by the utterance through the interaction of the propositions contained within the utterance with the propositions provided by the context, context here including the knowledge of the world shared by speaker and hearer. But even if a theory for the analysis of utterance interpretation can be developed within these terms, the task facing the writer of a pedagogic grammar seems hopeless. Not only is he faced with the task of attempting a typology of speech acts, but he has to provide it in a contextual vacuum. An attempt to include context within the grammar would mean incorporating within it an encyclopaedia.

That would not be necessary however, if speech acts are limited to the two categories I outlined in my first paragraph, that every utterance is intended either to give information, or as part of a negotiation. It is possible to maintain such a distinction while ignoring context, and the distinction itself can possibly be made without so much fuzziness as to render the two categories valueless or incapable of definition. The various interpretations I have suggested above for *It is raining* can easily be divided along these lines, as too

could other interpretations of the same utterance. But what makes this distinction so attractive is that, for English at least, when attempting to relate form to meaning, the analysis of certain areas of grammar appear to be enormously simplified if this approach is adopted. And for a pedagogic grammar simplicity must surely be an important criteria for adequacy.

One such area of grammar is the modals. Within these terms a sentence like

You could teach the class of intelligent students

isolated from context, can ambigously be interpreted as either informing the addressee of something the speaker feels he may not know, or it is some kind of suggestion or request. Analysing *can* within this framework will lead to a simplification of the many meanings normally associated with this verb in grammars. The modal *must* is given two meanings by Quirk, Greenbaum et. al.[3] which they describe as obligation and logical necessity, whatever that may mean. I would wish to argue that the effect of *must* is to introduce an element of obligation into an utterance if it is intended as one of negotiation and the effect of *must* is a logical necessity if the utterance is intended as one of information, but the essential meaning of *must* remains constant. The crucial factor is whether the utterance is intended as negotiation or information. This can be illustrated by setting out the two basic interpretations of

You must love your mother

as 1) speaker conviction + you love your mother + information
2) speaker conviction + you love your mother + negotiation

"Speaker conviction" here stands as the synonym for must.

I am not here concerned with examining the precise underlying meaning of the modal or how it is to be represented in a grammar, but if an utterance containing the modal is intended as one of information, then, in our example, the role of *must* is to add something to the proposition *you love your mother*. On the other hand, if the utterance is intended as one of negotiation, then the proposition expressed by *you love your mother* stands, and the role of *must* is to alter the behaviour of the addressee.

To conclude this section one or two general points can be made. An examination of the other English modals will reveal that they all lend themselves equally well to this treatment, though difficulties will be encountered in specifying a precise underlying meaning for each modal. This approach will redraw the line between grammar and pragmatics that those in the transformational school have drawn for example, but there is still a distinction to be made between language and linguistic rules in the abstract, and language in use. A pedagogic grammar will mostly be concerned with the former, but may have comments to make on language in use. For example, once an addressee has decided in a particular conversation, that an utterance containing *must* is intended as one of negotiation, then he also has to decide on the degree of obligation that is intended, and this will be influenced by such factors as the status relationships between the speaker and addressee. Pedagogic grammars may need to comment on such factors, though clearly conventions rather than rules are involved, and the conventions will need to be fuzzy.

The whole approach is not unlike that suggested by Halliday as early as 1970. He claimed that the organisation of language was such as to reveal three basic functions – the ideational, the expression of ideas; the interpersonal, interaction between people; and the textual, the interaction of language with itself and its situational context. He saw every sentence as containing an idea, a particular relationship to the listener, and a relationship to context, and linguistic description would provide three simultaneous analyses for each sentence to reflect three functions. This paper claims that utterances are intended either to express an idea OR to get the listener to do something.

Both the ease and difficulty of establishing these two speech act categories of information and negotiation can be illustrated by the following conversation, taken from the novel *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh (1945: 58). The narrator, an undergraduate at Oxford, has just returned home for the holidays, having overspent his annual allowance in the nine months of the academic year:

"One of the problems of the vacation is money, father."
"Oh, I shouldn't worry about a thing like that at your age."
"You see I've run rather short."
"Yes?" said my father without any sound of interest.

"In fact I don't quite know how I'm going to get through the next two months."

"Well I'm the worst person to come to for advice. I've never been 'short' as you so painfully call it. And yet what else could you say? Hard up? Penurious? Distressed? Embarassed? Stoney-broke? On the rocks? In Queer Street? Let us say you are in Queer Street and leave it at that. Your grandfather once said to me, 'Live within your means, but if you do get into difficulties, come to me. Don't go to the Jews.' Such a lot of nonsense. You try. Go to those gentlemen in Jermyn Street who offer advances on note of hand only. My dear boy, they won't give you a sovereign."

"Then what do you suggest my doing?"

"Your cousin Melchior was imprudent with his investments and got into a very queer street. *He* went to Australia."

The comic effect of this passage derives in the first place from the father's insistence on interpreting an utterance of negotiation as one of information, and then when he is forced to acknowledge that a negotiation is involved, he insists on interpreting it as a request for advice rather than as a request for money. But even then he continues to give information. Implying that his own father had always been willing to give financial assistance he advises against applying to the Jews as it would be a waste of effort. Finally, when he is forced to give advice, it seems inappropriate to the circumstances. From the point of view of our theory, this passage would seem to indicate that the line between utterances of negotiation and information should not be too rigidly drawn. Every conversational interaction involves rules for speaking which itself implies some type of negotiation, perhaps of a different and underlying kind.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Smith & Wilson (1979:22).
2. Matthews (1979:82).
3. Quirk et al. (1972:101 f.).